FoVO

Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Helping disadvantaged communities in Vietnam

Report to Donors

2025 Financial Year

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FoVO Vietnam Field Trip Key Map Red circles indicate some project locations.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

Our Donors

On behalf of the Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc (FoVO) Board, thank you to everyone whose donations helped us support disadvantaged people and communities in Vietnam during the year.

Monthly and Large Annual Donors

We are particularly grateful to the family and friends who made monthly or substantial annual contributions: Dennis, Clive, Jennifer and Brett, Michael & Adrienne, Geoff & Rachelle, Franziska, Hayden & Yến, Helen & David, Leo, Patrick H. and Richard Jackson.

We also greatly appreciate the friends and groups who made one-off donations:
Amanda, Julie & Jan, Paul & Suzette, the Aranda Men's Group, Kim Huỳnh, the Spiral Group and “Anon”.

Every contribution, large or small, helped make these projects possible.

FoVO Board and Project Partners

Our Board members — Julie, Dennis, Geoff and Clive — provided practical help, advice and encouragement throughout the year.

In Vietnam, Thi, our volunteer Fieldworker, helped plan and coordinate projects, interpret, check local circumstances and work with the people and organisations carrying them out.

We also worked with a network of local project partners, including village and shelter workers, nuns, university student groups, volunteer groups and medical workers. They are introduced in the individual project reports.

We were also fortunate to work alongside Thuy on charity projects in Vietnam. Sadly, Thuy died from cancer on 11 June 2025, aged 36. We remember her at the end of this report.

Our Approach

FoVO is a small charity. We have no paid staff and try to keep our projects equally simple.

We work through people who know the communities, visit projects where possible, ask what is actually needed and use local materials, labour and skills wherever practical. We try to spend money in Vietnam rather than transport donated goods from Australia.

Sometimes this means changing the project we first imagined.

During this year we repaired existing bicycles rather than replacing them. We abandoned a proposed bicycle project when we discovered that children in a remote mountain village walked to school because the tracks were too steep for bicycles. At a shelter for unmarried mothers, we extended a covered clothes-drying area rather than buy an electric dryer that would bring continuing electricity and maintenance costs.

Before providing chickens to disadvantaged households, our local partner first checked that each family already had the knowledge and facilities to raise them.

We sometimes describe this as our “barefoot” approach to charity: small, direct and adapted to local circumstances.

It also means accepting that we do not always get things right. A visit may reveal a different need from the one we expected, and a small project may sometimes lead to a larger one.

The projects in this report show how that approach worked in practice during the year.

During the financial year FoVO received $26,274 in donations and spent $20,500 on 12 projects in Vietnam.

Our projects were concentrated mainly in Central Vietnam, including the Central Highlands, but also extended to communities in Ha Tinh, Nghe An, Ninh Binh, Hue and Danang.

100% of donations made directly to FoVO were used for assistance in Vietnam. FoVO had no administration costs deducted from donations.

Peter Kabaila
Public Officer
Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc (FoVO)

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

Project Summary

How Your $20,500 Was Spent

NO.	PROJECT	AUD	MILLION VND
1	Bicycles for Students — Kon Hongo Kotu Village, Kontum; Ba Long Village, Khe Sanh; Nam Chieu Son Community, Hue; bicycle repairs at Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum; and villages around Ha Tinh City	**$4,415**	70.5
2	Shelter for Men with Mental Disorders, Pleiku, Gia Lai	**$1,035**	16.5
3	Supporting Advancement in Studies, Ha Tinh Province	**$2,300**	39
4	School Materials for Vinh Son 5 Shelter, Kontum	**$595**	10
5	Chicken Raising and Food Provisions for Con So Lang Village Shelter, Kontum	**$1,190**	20
6	Furniture and Reading Rooms for Three Village Schools, Kontum	**$4,775**	80
7	School for Children with Disabilities, Pleiku, Gia Lai	**$595**	10
8	Single Mothers' Shelter — Thien An, Ha Tinh	**$1,500**	25
9	Huoi Poc Village, Nam Can, Ky Son, Nghe An Province	**$1,320**	22
10	Chicken Raising in Villages around Phat Diem, Ninh Binh	**$1,280**	21.5
11	Family No. 4 Child Protection Centre, Danang	**$595**	10
12	Surgery to Enable a Fisherman to Walk and Work, Ha Tinh	**$900**	15
	TOTAL	**$20,500**	**339.5**

Totals are rounded. Exchange rates varied during the year.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1. Bicycles for Students

$4,415 (70.5M VND)

Description

During the year FoVO carried out five bicycle projects for students in Kontum, Khe Sanh, Hue and Ha Tinh. We provided 40 new bicycles and repaired another 10 bicycles already belonging to a children's shelter. In Vietnam, a bicycle is often much more than a means for a child to get to school. For families without motorcycles, bicycles are useful household vehicles. They can be used by students travelling to school, by adults going to farm work or neighbouring villages, and for carrying produce and other goods.

One locally available brand is Viet Nhat ("Vietnamese-Japanese"). These are sturdy, inexpensive bicycles suited to local conditions. A welded steel rack can carry goods or another passenger, while the front carrier can also be adapted to carry a small child.



Photo: Viet Nhat bicycle showing the welded steel front and rear carriers

The five bicycle projects were:

- Kon Hongo Kotu Village, Kontum — 20M VND ($1,250)
- Ba Long Village, Khe Sanh — 20M VND ($1,250)
- Nam Chieu Son community, Hue City — 10M VND ($625)
- Bicycle repairs at Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum — 4M VND ($255)
- Villages around Ha Tinh City — 16.5M VND (approximately $1,035)

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1.1 Kon Hongo Kotu Village, Kontum

$1,250 (20M VND)

Description

Kon Hongo Kotu is a Ba Na village in Kontum. Fifteen high school students from disadvantaged households were selected to receive new bicycles to help them travel to school and continue their education.

Our friend Y Tra, a Ba Na high school student, helped identify the students. He also provided descriptions in Vietnamese of their family circumstances and why each student needed a bicycle.

Recipient List

1. Y Rik (Year 10) — Comes from a large family with four siblings still at school. Her father is frequently ill and one sister has a disability. The family has an old bicycle handed down from her sisters, but it is broken.

2. Y Thư (Year 11) — Comes from a large family. Both parents are often sick. The family has an old bicycle handed down from older sisters, but it is now broken.

3. Y Phương Mai (Year 10) — Lives in a family of three. Her mother is frequently ill and she currently lives in a church-run boarding school.

4. A Khênh (Year 11) — Comes from a family with two children still at school. His father is frequently sick. The family's old bicycle, handed down from older siblings, is broken.

5. A Lăk (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with several children still at school. The family cannot afford a new bicycle and he borrows a friend's bicycle to get to school.

6. Y Ka (Year 11) — Comes from a family with four children, most still at school, including one child with a disability. Their old bicycle frequently breaks down.

7. Y Les (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with several children still at school. Their old donated bicycle is now broken.

8. Y Đăm (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with most children still attending school. Their old bicycle frequently breaks down.

9. Y Soang (Year 10) — Comes from a large family with six siblings still at school. An older brother is often sick and unable to help much. The family's old bicycle is now broken.

10. Y Guăt (Year 11) — Comes from a family of three siblings, most still at school. Their old bicycle frequently breaks down.

11. Y Nghi (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with three siblings still at school. Their old bicycle was stolen and the family now has to borrow a cousin's bicycle.

12. Y Choaih (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with several children still at school. An old bicycle handed down from her older sisters frequently breaks down.

13. Hà Y Mỹ (Year 11) — Comes from a large family with many siblings still at school. Her father died more than six years ago and her mother is frequently sick. The family's old bicycle, handed down from older sisters, frequently breaks down.

14. Y Ri (Year 10) — Comes from a large family with three siblings still at school. Their old bicycle has been handed down through two older sisters and often needs repair.

15. Y Non (Year 10) — Comes from a family of three siblings, most still at school. Their old bicycle frequently breaks down.


























Y Les lớp 11


Y Thuư lớp 11


Y Ri lớp 10























Observation

The information collected by Y Tra shows a recurring pattern. Many families already had a bicycle, but it was old, broken or had been handed down through several children. Other students depended on borrowed bicycles.

A bicycle therefore becomes part of a household's limited stock of useful possessions. It may pass from one child to another and remain in use for many years.

The selection process also shows the value of having someone from within the community identify the students. Y Tra knew the village and the circumstances of individual families in a way that an outside visitor could not.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1.2 Ba Long Village, Khe Sanh

$1,250 (20M VND), including transport

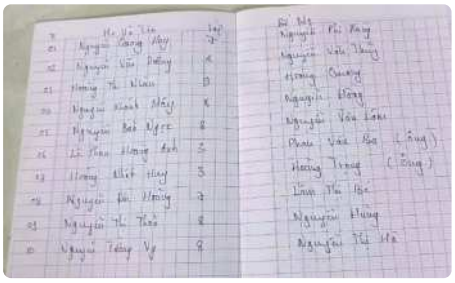
Description

This project complemented an annual charity visit organised by a Hue University student social club for children in the remote village of Ba Long, near the Laos border.

The university students raised their own funds for the visit. They organised singing and dancing, prepared a special meal for the children that included meat, and provided Mid-Autumn Festival entertainment and moon cakes.

A local pastor selected 10 students from Years 6 to 8 to receive bicycles. FoVO funded the bicycles and their transport by truck to the village. The village organised a large presentation event, making the arrival of the bicycles a memorable occasion for the students, their families and the visiting university students.





Student award list



Girl surrounded by villagers









Observation

FoVO's contribution was only one part of a much larger activity organised locally. The university students provided their own time, travel, fundraising and entertainment, while the local pastor helped identify the students who would benefit from bicycles.

This allowed a relatively small FoVO project to become part of a much larger community event.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1.3 Nam Chieu Son Community, Hue City

$625 (10M VND)

Description

We attended a children's Mid-Autumn Festival celebration in the Nam Chieu Son community in Hue City, organised and funded by students from Hue University.

A stage had been set up between houses beside a church, with loudspeakers providing karaoke-style music and announcements. Around 400 children gathered for the evening.

One of the performances was a small theatre sketch in which the Lady of the Moon asked a crying child why he was sad and comforted him with the gift of a festival lantern. Afterwards, hundreds of excited children crowded around the stage to receive show bags containing moon cakes and other treats.



On stage, the Lady of the Moon asks a crying child why he was sad and presents him a gift of a lantern to help celebrate the Moon Festival.

The university student group had also researched the circumstances of local families and identified five students from particularly disadvantaged households. FoVO provided each student with a bicycle and school supplies to encourage continued school attendance.

Observation

Although this was an urban rather than a remote village project, the same method worked well. Local university students identified children in need and FoVO provided a practical item that complemented an activity already being organised by the community.

The Mid-Autumn Festival also provided a natural occasion for presenting the bicycles without separating the recipients from the larger celebration involving hundreds of local children.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1.4 Bicycle Repairs at Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum

$255 (4M VND)

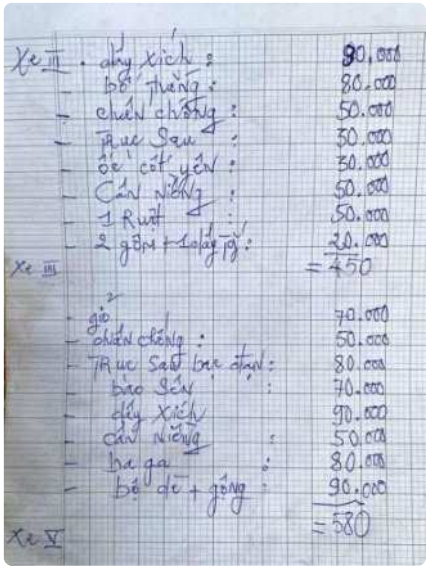
Description

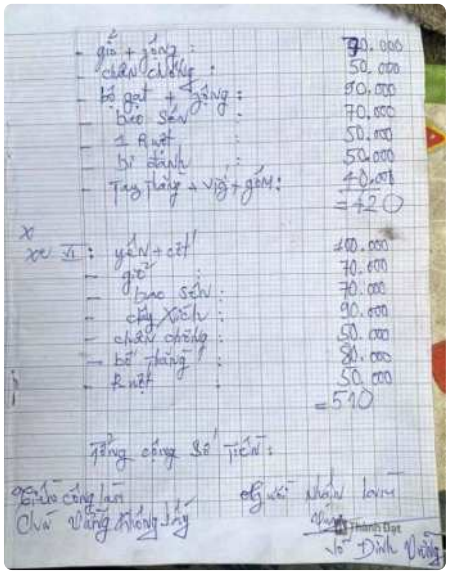
During an inspection visit to the Vinh Son 1 Shelter in Kontum City, beside the Cathedral, we noticed 10 broken bicycles stacked under cover.

Rather than buying new bicycles, we arranged for a local bicycle repair shop to collect them.

All 10 bicycles were repaired, with new components fitted where necessary, and returned to the shelter in working order.



















recording the repairs and replacement parts.

Before and after photos of the bicycle repair. The bicycle shop provided detailed, itemised accounts

Observation

This project was not planned before our visit. It came simply from noticing something that could be put back into use.

Ten repaired bicycles for about $255 represented much better value than purchasing replacements. The work was also carried out by a local repairer using locally available parts.

Reflection

This small project illustrates an important part of FoVO's approach. The best response is not necessarily to buy something new. Sometimes useful equipment is already there but has stopped working. Looking carefully, repairing what can be repaired and using local skills can achieve more with a small amount of money than replacing things unnecessarily.

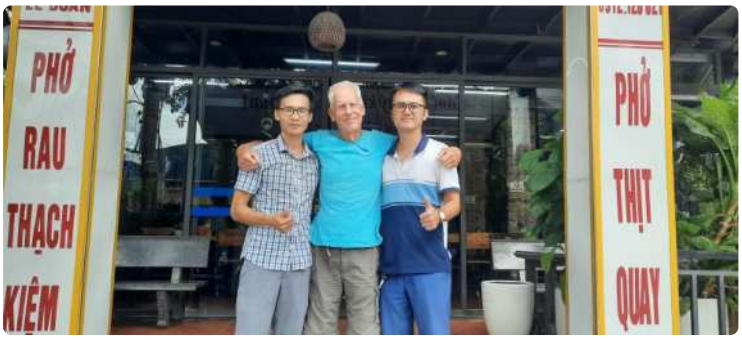
REPORT TO DONORS 2025

1.5 Bicycles for Students in Villages around Ha Tinh City

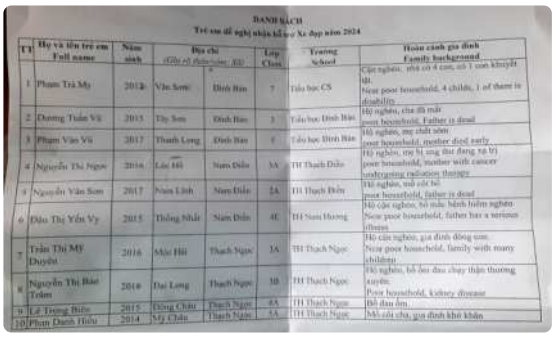
approximately $1,035 (16.5M VND), including delivery

Description

Our project partners Hiep and Nam "1" visited four small villages on the outskirts of Ha Tinh City and identified students whose families could not readily afford bicycles. Hiep lives in Ha Tinh City and leads a group of volunteers who periodically undertake local charity projects. Working with Nam "1", he helped identify 10 students for this project. FoVO provided 10 new Viet Nhat bicycles, including delivery to the villages.



With Nam "1", on my right and Hiep, on my left.



DANH SÁCH

TT	Họ và tên trẻ em Full name	Năm sinh	Địa chỉ	Lớp Class	Trường School	Hoàn cảnh gia đình Family background
1	Phạm Trà My	2012	Vân Sơn	7	Tiểu học CS	Cận nghèo, nhà có 4 con, có 1 con khuyết tật. Near poor household, 4 children, 1 of them is disability
2	Dương Tuấn Vũ	2015	Tây Sơn	3	Tiểu học Đỉnh Bàn	Hộ nghèo, cha đã mất poor household, Father is dead
3	Phạm Văn Vũ	2017	Thanh Long	1	Tiểu học Đỉnh Bàn	Hộ nghèo, mẹ chết sớm poor household, mother died early
4	Nguyễn Thị Ngọc	2016	Lộc Hà	3A	TH Thạch Đỉnh	Hộ nghèo, mẹ bị ung thư đang xạ trị poor household, mother with cancer undergoing radiation therapy
5	Nguyễn Văn Sơn	2017	Nam Linh	2A	TH Thạch Đỉnh	Hộ nghèo, mẹ chết bệ poor household, father is dead
6	Đậu Thị Yến Vy	2015	Thống Nhất	4E	TH Nam Hương	Hộ cận nghèo, bố mắc bệnh hiểm nghèo Near poor household, father has a serious illness
7	Trần Thị Mỹ Duyên	2016	Mới Hồi	3A	TH Thạch Ngọc	Hộ cận nghèo, gia đình đông con. Near poor household, family with many children
8	Nguyễn Thị Bảo Trâm	2014	Đại Lộng	3B	TH Thạch Ngọc	Hộ nghèo, bố lao động thận thường xuyên Poor household, kidney disease
9	Lê Trọng Biên	2015	Đồng Chùa	4A	TH Thạch Ngọc	Bố đau ốm
10	Phan Danh Hiếu	2014	Mỹ Châu	5A	TH Thạch Ngọc	Mồ côi cha, gia đình khó khăn

Student bicycle list

Recipient List

1. Phạm Trà My (Year 7) — Low-income family with four children, one of whom has a disability.

2. Dương Tuấn Vũ (Year 3) — Father has died; mother has cancer.

3. Phạm Văn Vũ (Year 5) — Orphan living with his grandmother.

4. Nguyễn Thị Ngọc (Year 3A) — Low-income family. Father is sick and unable to work.

5. Nguyễn Văn Sơn (Year 2A) — Low-income family. Father has died.

6. Đậu Thị Yến Vy (Year 4E) — Low-income family. Mother is sick.

7. Trần Thị Mỹ Duyên (Year 3A) — Low-income family with many children.

8. Nguyễn Thị Bảo Trâm (Year 3B) — Low-income family. Father requires kidney treatment.

9. Lê Trọng Biên (Year 4A) — Low-income family.

10. Phan Danh Hiếu (Year 5A) — Low-income family. Father died when he was young.





Quan



Nguyễn Văn Sơn (Class 2A)



Unwrapping the plastic cover.



Phạm Trà My (Class 7)

Observation

As at Kon Hongo Kotu, the recipient list records why the local volunteers selected particular students.

Poverty was often compounded by the death or illness of a parent, disability within the family, or the responsibility of supporting several school-aged children.

The project depended on Hiep and Nam "1" doing the groundwork: visiting the villages, finding the families and deciding where a bicycle would be most useful.

Reflection — The Bicycle Projects

These five projects used several different local networks: a Ba Na high school student, a village pastor, university student groups, local volunteers and the staff of an established children's shelter.

There was no single method of finding a bicycle project. In some places local partners identified students before FoVO became involved. At Vinh Son 1, the project arose unexpectedly from something we noticed during a field visit.

What the projects had in common was their simplicity. Bicycles are inexpensive, locally available, repairable and immediately useful. For a student they can make travelling to school easier, but in poorer households they are also likely to be shared and used for many other everyday purposes.

The lesson for FoVO is not simply that "bicycles are a good project". It is that small projects work best when the need is identified locally, the assistance suits local conditions, and the solution is kept as simple as possible.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

2. Shelter for Men with Mental Disorders in Pleiku, Gia Lai

$1,000 (16.5M VND)

Description

Huu Phuoc is a truck driver and small businessman living outside Pleiku. His involvement in caring for men with mental disorders began after his own son was treated at the state psychiatric hospital in Pleiku and was released back into his care.

Phuoc subsequently began taking in other men brought to him by their families. Over time the number increased and he added more accommodation at his farm. At the time of our visit, we were told that as many as 100 men could be living there.

The operation is remarkably small for the number of people involved. Phuoc and his wife appear to undertake much of the day-to-day work themselves. His wife manages the cooking and feeding of the residents, while Phuoc earns money from truck driving and other activities. We were told that a psychiatrist from the local psychiatric hospital assists with the men's medical care.

Some of the more stable residents undertake jobs around the farm and coffee plantation.

FoVO Assistance

During our visit, our interpreter spoke at length with Phuoc's wife about the practical problems she faced.

The immediate problem was not another building or piece of specialised equipment. It was food.

The kitchen sometimes ran short of rice, while two large 10-litre electric rice cookers were old and needed replacement. We therefore agreed to provide:

- 500 kg of rice
- 20 boxes of noodles, each containing 30 packets
- two new 10-litre electric rice cookers

Total cost: 16.5M VND (approximately $1,000).



Kitchen food preparation



One of the 10 litre rice cookers



Nourishing meaty stew

Observation

This was one of the most confronting visits during our work in Vietnam.

Many of the men appeared to have serious mental disorders. Some lived behind barred doors, while others who were considered at risk of running away or becoming violent were physically restrained. Conditions were basic and the number of residents appeared very large in comparison with the small number of people caring for them.

Yet the situation was more complicated than the first impression suggested. Some residents moved relatively freely and helped with work around the property. During the visit we saw men tending animals and working on the coffee plantation. Three men were absorbed in dismantling and reassembling a tractor.

Field Note: The shelter had developed informally from one family's experience of mental illness and was unlike any institution we had previously visited. Phuoc combined its operation with farming, truck driving, a funeral service and free transport for terminally ill patients. The circumstances were complex and sometimes confronting, and a short visit left many questions unanswered.













Truck driver and manager of the facility Phuoc

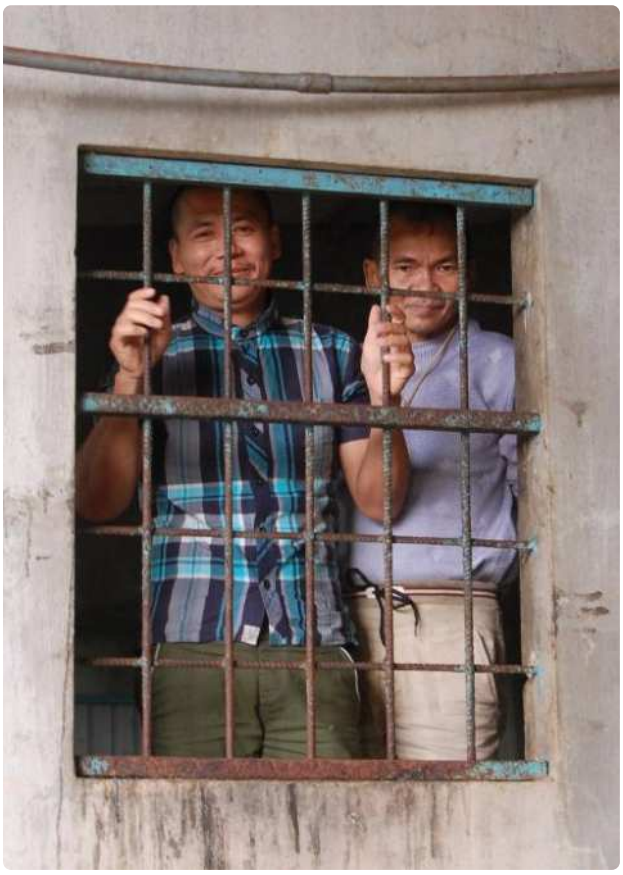














Phuoc's house



Phuoc's smaller funeral truck









One resident had suffered a stroke and could not speak. He communicated by means of a handwritten note asking for a notebook and pencils.

The visit left us with many questions about the men's circumstances, their medical care and the way the shelter operated. We were visitors and could not answer those questions from a single inspection.

What we could establish was something much simpler. Whatever the wider circumstances of the shelter, a very large number of men had to be fed every day, and the kitchen sometimes ran short of its most basic staple — rice.

Reflection

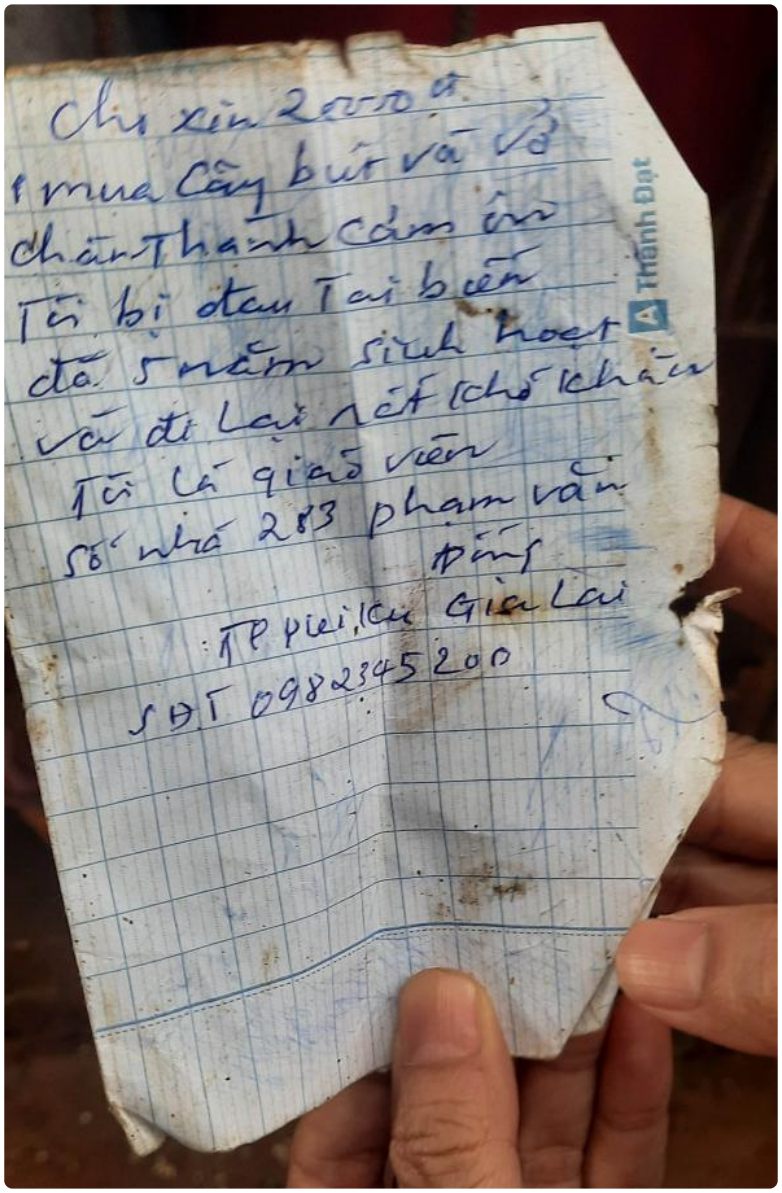
FoVO was not in a position to solve the much larger problems we observed at the shelter. Nor were we qualified to make judgements about the psychiatric treatment of individual residents.

We could, however, respond to an immediate need that was clearly within our capacity.

Providing rice, noodles and two large rice cookers was a modest intervention, but it helped stabilise the daily provision of food for the men living there.

The visit reinforced a lesson that applies to many FoVO projects: we do not have to solve every problem we encounter before doing something useful.

Sometimes the appropriate response for a small charity is to identify one practical need, make sure that it is real, and deal with that need well.



The note says: I have suffered a stroke and cannot speak. Please help me by providing a notebook and pencils.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

3. Supporting Advancement in Studies — Ha Tinh Province

$2,300 (39M VND)

Description

This project provided direct educational assistance to five students from fishing communities in Ha Tinh Province.

The families live in an area where traditional fishing livelihoods have been under severe economic pressure. The effects of the 2016 Formosa Ha Tinh Steel pollution disaster were still being felt in the communities from which several of these students came.

FoVO's assistance was individually tailored. Rather than providing the same amount or type of support to every student, we helped with particular expenses that might otherwise have prevented them from continuing their education: university living costs, school expenses, language tuition and technical college fees.

Students Supported

Nguyen Hung — Hue University

Hung was completing the final year of a four-year Information Technology course at Hue University. His parents are from a fishing family. His father has been ill and unable to work for several years. FoVO had assisted the family previously.

We contributed 5M VND (approximately $300) towards Hung's living costs during his internship.



Hung in front of the university building.

Nguyen Ha Tram — Year 11

Tram has two brothers of school age and her parents have been unemployed for a long period. She is a strong student, was at the top of her class and was teaching herself Chinese. Her ambition was to develop her English and Chinese sufficiently to compete for a scholarship to study languages at university.

FoVO contributed 14.5M VND (approximately $860) towards her first year of language tuition.



Standing with Tram

Nguyen Thao Vy — Year 8

Thao Vy has two younger siblings. Her father grew up working as a fisherman and her mother came from a rice-farming family.

Following the collapse of local fishing, her father could obtain only temporary casual work. Her parents moved to Danang in search of employment, where her mother found work as a maid. Thao Vy remained in the village with her aunt so that she could continue at school.

FoVO contributed 3.5M VND (approximately $200) towards her school expenses.



Thao Vy

Nguyen Thi Luyen — Nha Trang University

Luyen was completing the final year of a journalism course at Nha Trang University. Her father died of cancer and her mother works on another family's fishing boat. Luyen is the youngest of six children. Her five older siblings were unable to complete school and now work in fishing or sell fish at the market.

Luyen was determined to complete her degree and find stable employment outside the village. FoVO contributed 5M VND (approximately $300) towards her living costs.



School award for achievement in 5 key areas of study.

Vo Thien Trang — Technical College, Hue

Trang commenced the first year of a three-year carer/nursing course at a technical college in Hue.

Her mother is a construction labourer and her father a carpenter. Neither parent had the opportunity to become literate. Trang left her home province to study in Hue and lived in a convent boarding house for girls, where accommodation was provided without charge but she paid for her food.

FoVO contributed 11M VND (approximately $650) towards her first term course fees.

Trang subsequently found that her village schooling had not adequately prepared her for the technical demands of the course. She discontinued her studies and returned to her village.



The school's High School graduation fundraiser photo with Thien Trang holding her certificate with flowers.

Observation

The circumstances of the five students show that the obstacle to continuing education was not always simply the cost of tuition.

For Hung and Luyen, assistance with living expenses helped them remain at university. For Tram, additional language tuition could improve her chances of entering university. For Thao Vy, relatively modest school expenses mattered because her parents had moved away to find work. Trang needed help with technical college fees.

The project also showed the importance of looking at the circumstances of each student rather than creating a standard scholarship.

Trang's experience was particularly instructive. Financial assistance could get her into the course, but it could not compensate for gaps in her earlier schooling. Her withdrawal was disappointing, but it is important to record it. Not every project produces the outcome that was hoped for.

Field Note

The students came from coastal communities still affected by the consequences of the 2016 Formosa Ha Tinh Steel pollution disaster, which severely damaged fishing livelihoods along the central Vietnamese coast. For some families, the decline of fishing contributed to parents leaving their villages in search of casual work elsewhere.

The disaster also became a politically sensitive issue involving compensation, public protest and conflict between affected communities and government authorities. These wider circumstances form part of the background to FoVO's work in the Ha Tinh fishing villages and are recorded separately in the FoVO Field Notes.

Reflection

Education is often spoken about as a pathway out of poverty, but these five cases show that the pathway is neither simple nor guaranteed.

For students from poor fishing families, getting into a course may be only the beginning. Tuition fees, accommodation, food, transport, family illness and the need for parents to migrate for work can all determine whether a student is able to continue. Small, individually targeted assistance can sometimes remove one of those obstacles.

Trang's experience provides an equally important lesson. FoVO paid her first-term fees in good faith, but the course proved unsuitable because her previous schooling had not prepared her adequately. The money did not produce the outcome we hoped for, but the experience suggests that future educational assistance should consider not only a student's financial need and ambition, but also whether the proposed course is realistically matched to their educational preparation.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

4. School Materials for Vinh Son 5 Shelter, Kontum

$600 (10M VND)

Description

Vinh Son 5 Shelter in Kontum provided a home for 55 children, many from Indigenous highland communities.

During our visit, FoVO arranged medical checks for the children with Dr Trong. We also asked our volunteer tutor Lan Anh to accompany one of the nuns to purchase school materials that the children actually needed.

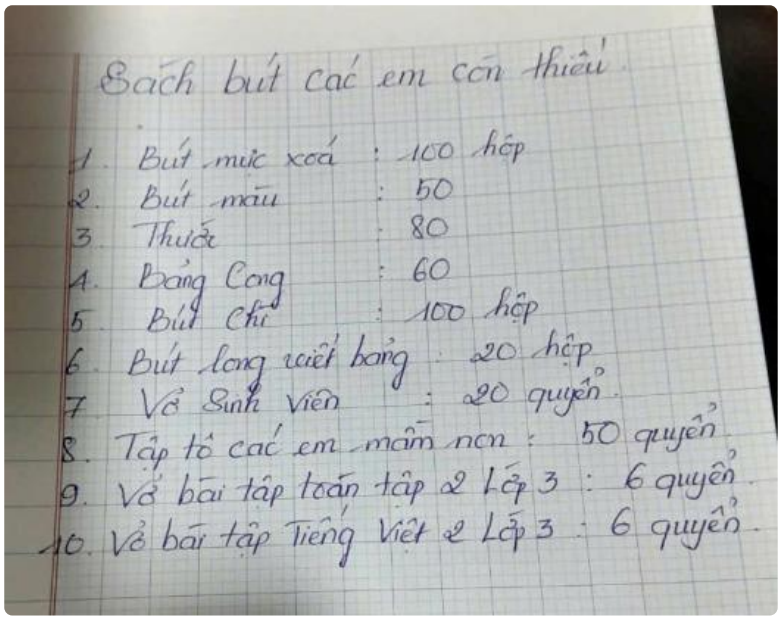
The supplies included:

- markers and coloured pencils
- pencils and rulers
- children's chalkboards for writing practice
- correction pens
- notebooks and colouring books
- school textbooks.

The total cost was 10M VND (approximately $600).



Children at Vinh Son 5 with the school materials]



List of materials

Observation

This was a simple project, but the way the materials were selected was important.

Rather than arriving with donated stationery chosen in Australia, FoVO arranged for a person who knew the children and their schooling to purchase the materials locally with one of the nuns. This meant that the supplies matched what the children actually required and could be bought economically in Vietnam.

The medical checks by Dr Trong also formed part of the visit, although the cost recorded for this project was for the school materials.

Reflection

Small projects do not need to be complicated.

In this case, the need was identified locally, the materials were selected by people who knew the children, and they were purchased locally. This avoided transport costs and the risk of providing donated goods that were unsuitable or unnecessary.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

5. Chickens and Food — Con So Lang Village Shelter, Kontum

$1,200 (20M VND)

Description

Con So Lang Village Shelter near Kontum was run by two Indigenous Xơ Đăng (Sedang) nuns associated with the Vinh Son network of shelters and provided accommodation for 21 school-aged Indigenous girls, enabling them to attend the nearby school.

The shelter already had a productive vegetable garden and a well-maintained chicken run. Rather than introduce something new, FoVO helped expand an activity that was already working.

We provided 50 young chickens and a bag of feed, together with several weeks of food supplies for the girls.

The total project cost was 20M VND (approximately $1,200):

- 10M VND for chickens and feed
- 10M VND for food supplies.





Existing chicken run and chickens

Observation

The chicken project was particularly suitable because the shelter already had the facilities and experience to raise chickens. The additional birds could supplement the girls' diet while making use of an existing chicken run rather than requiring another structure or new skills.

However, our visit identified a much larger need.

The girls were sleeping in a makeshift dormitory constructed largely from sheet metal. It was poorly lit, had no proper windows and no insulation. The metal construction would make the room extremely hot in warm weather and very noisy during heavy rain.

Field observation: In the original report I described the two nuns as Ba Na because they worked within the Vinh Son network centred on Kontum, where FoVO had considerable contact with Ba Na communities. Vietnamese colleagues did not normally distinguish the nuns by ethnic group, referring simply to dân tộc (“ethnic minority”). When I later asked the nuns directly, they told me they were Xơ Đăng (Sedang).



Existing girls dormitory We inspected and measured an alternative location for improved accommodation and sent sketches to

Long, a local builder with whom FoVO had worked, asking him to investigate feasibility and prepare an estimate.

At that stage no commitment had been made to undertake the larger project. We were exploring whether it might be possible in partnership with another charity.



Interior - possible alternative dormitory area



Interior - possible alternative dormitory area

Reflection

The immediate project was small: food and chickens. But the visit demonstrated another value of working on the ground.

We had come with an achievable project based on something the shelter was already doing successfully.

While there, we saw a much more serious problem that could not responsibly be solved on the spot. Instead, we measured the existing conditions, considered alternatives and sought local building advice. The small project therefore became the starting point for investigating a much larger one.

This is often how FoVO projects develop. One completed project leads to a better understanding of what may be needed next.

Retrospective Note: The inadequate dormitory identified during this visit subsequently became the subject of a larger FoVO project in 2025 – 26.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

6. Furniture and Reading Rooms for Three Village Schools, Kontum

$4,775 (80M VND)

Description

This project began with a visit to a small village school at Ngọc Leang, in the Tu Mơ Rông district about 50 km from Kontum City. Although the distance is not great, reaching the village involved a three-hour journey up a steep mountain road.

Ngọc Leang is a remote Xơ Đăng (Sedang) community of about 1,000 people. Families mainly depend on farming, cattle raising and labouring on Vietnamese-owned coffee plantations. The children's school was relatively new but lacked basic furniture.

What began as assistance to one school subsequently expanded to three village schools: Ngọc Leang, Plei Jodrop and Kon Trang Monei.

Across the three schools FoVO provided:

- **80 tables**
- **seven bookshelves**
- **100 plastic chairs**
- books for two school reading rooms.

Two of the schools were therefore able to establish reading rooms, each fitted with tables, bookshelves and books.

The total project cost was 80M VND (approximately $4,775):

- 36M VND — materials for tables and bookshelves
- 6M VND — 100 plastic chairs
- 20M VND — wages for two village workers for 26 days
- 18M VND — books for two reading rooms.





Village school with new furniture



Completed furniture/reading room

Observation

Rather than purchase finished school furniture elsewhere and transport it into the villages, we visited a small furniture-making workshop in Kontum City.

The tables and bookshelves were simple and robust, made from lightweight galvanised steel square tubing with laminated timber panels made from plantation-grown rubberwood.







Furniture under construction and finished desks stacked on delivery truck

The project also provided 26 days of paid work for two village workers who assisted with fabrication.

Part of the project expenditure therefore went directly into local wages as well as providing the schools with the furniture they needed.

The project grew through local contacts. Once the need at Ngọc Leang had been identified and a practical means of making the furniture established, it became possible to extend the same approach to two other village schools.

Reflection

The project demonstrated the advantages of making simple equipment locally.

Local manufacture avoided transporting bulky donated furniture from elsewhere, allowed the furniture to be made to suit the schools, provided paid work locally and meant that future repairs or replacements could also be undertaken locally.

The two reading rooms were more than a furniture project. Tables, shelves and books together created places within the schools where children could read and study.

Like several other FoVO projects, this one grew after the original need was identified. It began with one inadequately furnished village school and expanded into a practical project benefiting three communities.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

7. School for Children with Disabilities — Pleiku, Gia Lai

$600 (10M VND)

Description

This boarding and day school in Pleiku, run by nuns from a local convent, cared for and educated about 80 children with a wide range of disabilities.

The school had received assistance and advice from overseas sponsors and visiting Western staff over a number of years.

When we visited, the nuns identified several things they would like assistance with, including a large loudspeaker for school announcements, new computers for the computer room and financial assistance towards teachers' salaries.

These were beyond what FoVO could reasonably provide within the budget available for this project. After discussion with the nuns, we agreed instead to assist with some immediate practical needs. FoVO provided:

- five wheelchairs, supplementing the two already available at the school; and
- school and activity materials, including colouring materials and plasticine.

The total cost was 10M VND (approximately $600).







Children using the wheelchairs and activity materials]

Observation

The visit illustrated the importance of discussing a request rather than automatically agreeing to the first items proposed.

Computers, sound equipment and continuing contributions towards salaries may all have been useful to the school, but they would have absorbed a substantial part of FoVO's available funds and, in the case of salaries, created an expectation of continuing support.

The wheelchairs addressed an immediate need that could be met completely within a small project. The additional school materials were inexpensive and could be used directly by the children.

The photographs taken during the project show the wheelchairs in use and children working with the drawing and modelling materials.

Reflection

A small charity cannot meet every worthwhile request.

FoVO therefore needs to consider not only whether something is needed, but whether it is an appropriate project for us to undertake. A modest project that can be fully funded and put into immediate use may sometimes be preferable to making a small contribution towards a much larger or continuing expense.

In this case, discussion with the nuns resulted in a simple project suited both to the school's needs and to FoVO's capacity.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

8. Single Mothers' Shelter — Thien An, Ha Tinh

$1,500 (25M VND)

Description

This small shelter at Thien An in Ha Tinh was run by two nuns and provided temporary accommodation and support for unmarried pregnant women and girls.

At the time of our visit, four high-school-aged girls in Years 10 and 11 were staying there. FoVO Fieldworker Thi, who spoke at length with the nuns and girls, described the shelter's role simply:
“No help from parents and no support from government and no acceptance from society. This shelter provides accommodation and help during their pregnancy for the girls. And this shelter also provides a place for them to hide themselves from a difficult society.”

The shelter generally accommodated women during pregnancy and for about a month following the birth.

The nuns also assisted with adoption where a mother decided not to keep her baby.

Our project developed from discussions with the nuns and inspection of the shelter.

The kitchen and dining area was covered by a simple metal roof that leaked badly during heavy rain. We arranged for a local builder to replace defective roof sheets, install flashing, gutters and downpipes.

The nuns initially asked whether FoVO could provide an electric clothes dryer for the cloth nappies. We were concerned about the continuing electricity cost and maintenance of another appliance. After discussion, it was agreed that extending the existing covered outdoor drying area would provide a simpler solution.



Cloth nappy drying area: Instead of creating an electric dryer maintenance problem, we are looking at extension of the existing rain cover in the drying yard. Also roof repairs to manage leaks in the main kitchen/dining area.



Nun standing at our completed extension



Our roof waterproofing is out of sight, but makes a crucial difference for keeping the interior from flooding during tropical downpours.

Existing drying area, completed extension and kitchen roof repairs]

Care packages for the girls

During discussions about the girls' circumstances, Thi spoke with them individually about the personal things they needed.

Rather than decide for them, she helped each girl prepare an anonymous list. As the girls became more comfortable with the exercise, they added things they had initially been reluctant to ask for.

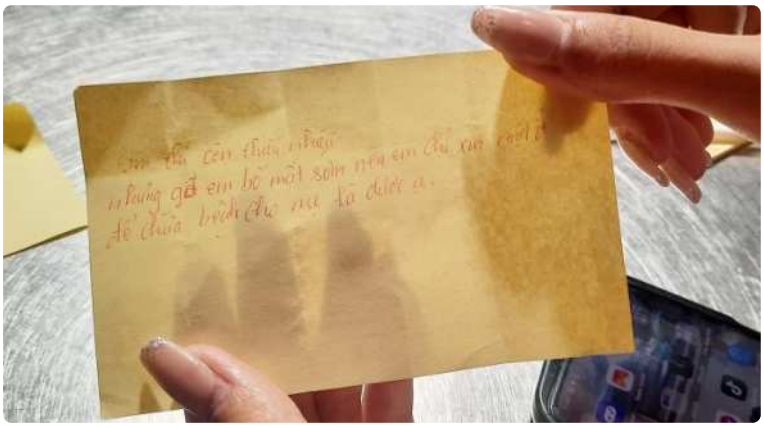
Requests included moisturiser for stretch marks, lip balm, maternity clothes and warm jackets for winter. Thi then went to the local market with one of the nuns and purchased an individual care package for each girl based on her list. FoVO also provided baby clothes, towels and other laundry supplies.

The personal items and laundry supplies cost 4M VND (approximately $250). The remainder of the 25M VND ($1,500) project funded the covered drying-area extension and kitchen roof repairs.

Local workers were employed and purchased the building materials themselves, allowing the work to be completed at village labour rates.



Gathering the anonymous lists of items needed by each girl at the shelter.



Girl holds her request on a note



Girls come to collect their bags and check the contents

Observation

The most revealing part of the visit was not necessarily the building work.

The girls initially appeared reluctant to ask for personal things. Thi's conversations with them and the use of anonymous lists allowed them to identify small items that mattered to them without having to make the requests publicly.

The resulting care packages were individually different. They were not simply bags of standard toiletries selected beforehand by FoVO.

Lunch with the two nuns and girls also gave us a better understanding of the shelter. Despite the difficult circumstances that had brought the girls there, the atmosphere around the table was warm and informal, more like a household than an institution.



With the two nuns who run the shelter. Framed on the wall are photos of the local benefactor who left land for the shelter in their will.

The practical building work provided another example of choosing a simple solution. Extending the covered drying area avoided purchasing an electric dryer with continuing electricity and maintenance costs.

Field Note

The shelter provided more than accommodation for pregnant girls. Thi's conversations indicated that pregnancy outside marriage could bring rejection by family and considerable social shame, particularly for girls still at school.

The nuns therefore provided somewhere where a girl could withdraw temporarily from her community as well as receive practical support during pregnancy.

We were told that the people coming to the shelter had changed over time. Previously they had included young women who had left villages for factory work or employment in Thailand. More recently, the nuns were seeing local high-school girls. About 20 pregnant women and girls were said to pass through the shelter each year.

Adoption was also an important part of the shelter's work. The nuns told us that adoptive families were carefully assessed and that there was considerable demand to adopt babies.

These circumstances, and the attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy that lay behind them, are considered more fully in a separate FoVO Field Note.

Reflection

This project began with practical needs — a leaking roof and somewhere to dry nappies — but the visit showed that assistance could also respond to less visible needs.

The care packages cost relatively little. Their value was partly in allowing each girl to decide for herself what she needed.

That distinction matters. Asking people what they need can produce a different project from deciding

what they need on their behalf.

The project also reinforced the value of FoVO's Vietnamese fieldworker. Language interpretation was only part of Thi's role. Understanding what was happening within the shelter, gaining the confidence of the girls and translating their circumstances for FoVO were equally important.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

9. School and Village Support — Huoi Poc, Nghe An Province

$1,320 (22M VND)

Description

Huoi Poc is a small Mong Indigenous village in the mountains of Ky Son District, Nghe An Province, close to the Laos border.

The village is high in the mountains and difficult to reach. Rain makes the steep tracks slippery and sometimes dangerous, and getting children to school is itself a challenge. FoVO initially considered providing bicycles for students. After discussing local conditions, however, it became clear that bicycles would be of little use. The mountain road was too steep and difficult, and the children normally walked to school.

Our project partner was Hiep's charity group, which organised the visit and delivery. Rather than bicycles, the combined project provided practical school and village supplies suited to the conditions.

The overall program was valued at approximately 47 million VND ($2,800), of which FoVO contributed 22 million VND ($1,320). Hiep's group and other donors provided the balance.

Supplies included:

- sports shoes, socks, umbrellas and rainwear;
- pencils, notebooks, crayons and modelling clay;
- towels and other items for kindergarten children;
- foam sleeping mats;
- food including rice, fish sauce, cooking oil and milk;
- soap and other household supplies;
- a solar lamp, water buckets and other practical equipment; and
- donated children's clothing and outdoor toys.

Some retailers also reduced the cost by donating part of the goods.



Huoi Poc, a small Mong Indigenous village near the Laos border



Volunteer group arriving at the end of the formal road

Observation

The journey to Huoi Poc explained why the original bicycle idea was abandoned. The formal road ended before the village. The remaining track had to be negotiated on foot and by motorbike. At one point the volunteers had to clear a soil slide to make the track passable.



Clearing a soil slide to make the track passable



Carrying a second-hand mattress up the village track

Even relatively ordinary items became difficult to transport. A second-hand mattress for the children's midday sleep had to be carried up the village track.



Carrying the foam floor mats we provided for children’s midday sleep.

The photographs of the delivery show children meeting the truck on the track and helping unload the supplies. They provide a better explanation of the village's isolation than a description of distance alone.



Children meet the delivery truck on the village track



Children unloading the truck.

The project also illustrates the value of checking local conditions before purchasing anything. A bicycle sounds like an obvious way to help a child travel to school. At Huoi Poc it would have been an inappropriate solution. Shoes, umbrellas, school materials and other things that could be carried and used locally were much more practical.

Reflection

This was not the project FoVO first imagined.

The change from bicycles to basic school and household supplies was not a reduction in the project. It was the result of learning more about the place.

Huoi Poc was a useful reminder that appropriate assistance begins with local conditions rather than with a preferred type of donation. The question was not simply what FoVO could provide, but what would actually be useful after it arrived.

The project also demonstrated the importance of a local partner. Hiep's group could assess the conditions, organise purchases and undertake a difficult delivery that FoVO could not realistically have managed from Australia.



Arrival at the village school.



Children with our umbrellas. (It's a very rainy place).



Official proceedings for kindergarten.



Primary School assembly for the occasion.





REPORT TO DONORS 2025

10. Chicken Raising in Villages Around Phat Diem, Ninh Binh

$1,280 (21.5M VND)

Description

This project provided chickens to 20 disadvantaged households living in villages around Phat Diem.

Our project partner was Sister Kinh, a local nun who has spent many years working with families in these communities. Rather than simply distributing chickens, she first visited prospective households to assess their circumstances.

The families selected were already familiar with raising chickens. Sister Kinh checked that each household had suitable chicken housing and the capacity and willingness to care for the birds.

Each of the 20 households then received:

- 20 vaccinated young chickens; and
- one bag of chicken feed.

A total of 400 chickens was distributed.

The aim was simple: households could raise the chickens for food, breeding or sale, providing both improved nutrition and a small source of income.

Observation

The most important part of this project happened before the chickens were distributed.

Sister Kinh knew the communities and could identify households experiencing hardship. Her home visits also established whether a family was actually in a position to raise chickens successfully.



Sister Kinh's inspection visits to prospective households

The inspection photographs show very basic living conditions in some households. More importantly, they record the existing containers, yards and simple structures available for keeping and feeding chickens.

Only after these visits were the chickens and feed purchased and distributed.

Sister Kinh sent us a photographic record for each household, confirming both the initial inspection and the distribution of assistance. The full record is kept in FoVO's files; only a small selection is included here.





Sister Kinh recording distribution of chickens and feed

Reflection

Giving chickens is a very simple livelihood project, but the success of the project depends upon who receives them and what happens afterwards.

FoVO did not need to create a new livelihood or teach an unfamiliar skill. The selected villagers already knew how to raise chickens. The project provided a small productive asset that could fit into existing household life.

Sister Kinh's role was therefore central. Her local knowledge allowed households to be selected on the basis of both need and capacity, while her continuing visits provided a simple form of monitoring.

This is the sort of small project that suits FoVO: local knowledge, modest cost, familiar technology and assistance that households can manage themselves.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

11. Family No. 4 Child Protection Centre, Danang

$595 (10M VND)

Description

Child Protection Centre No. 4 is one of several shelters for children in Danang and was home to 23 children at the time of our visit.

Thi coordinated an activity day at the centre with two groups of university students, one from architecture and the other from medicine. Rather than simply delivering supplies, the students planned a day of activities with the children.

FoVO provided the funds for rice and instant noodles requested by the shelter, ingredients for a communal lunch, prizes for games and singing competitions, and personalised football-style sports uniforms for each child. The students organised the activities, cooked the lunch and spent the day with the children.

The uniforms came from discussions between the students and the shelter. Football is enormously popular in Vietnam, and each child's shirt carried their name and team number. A small FoVO badge was included on the front.

Observation

This project worked because the university students contributed much more than FoVO's $595.

They planned the day, organised games and singing competitions, prepared the meal and joined the children for lunch. The photographs show the children and students mixing quite naturally rather than the visit being confined to a formal handover of donated goods.

The personalised sports uniforms were particularly successful. They gave the children something individually their own while also making them members of a team.

There was plenty of humour. I was given my own shirt, with “Pi To” printed on the back, and my gold-crowned teeth apparently provided considerable entertainment for the children.

Reflection

A small grant can achieve more when it supports other people's voluntary effort rather than paying for everything itself.

In this case, FoVO supplied the money and some coordination, while Vietnamese university students supplied much of the imagination, preparation and labour. The result was not only rice, noodles, uniforms and a meal, but a day in which the children participated in something enjoyable with young people from their own community.



Group photo with everyone cheering "Mot, hai, ba, zo!" (Hip hip hooray!)



Games and singing competitions organised by the university students.



University students preparing the communal lunch.



Children, students and staff sharing lunch.



Students joined the communal lunch.



Gold crowns on Peter's teeth provided great amusement for the children.



The personalised sports uniforms were a big hit. One boy, in particular, had the students in stitches as he pulled faces while showing off his new outfit.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

12. Surgery to Enable a Fisherman to Walk and Work

$900 (15M VND)

Description

Diệm was born in 1977 in a small fishing village in Ha Tinh Province. One of six children, he left school after Year 2 and began working with his father as a fisherman. By the age of 13 he was working on ocean-going fishing boats and later as a diver.

His wife, Shern, also came from a fishing family and left school early. Neither can read or write. They have three children and have depended largely on small-scale fishing for their livelihood.

Diệm had fished from childhood and it was the only work he knew. One of the most physically demanding parts of the work was launching fishing boats from the beach. Sitting on the sand, the fishermen pushed the heavily loaded boats towards the water with their legs, placing extreme loads on the hips and legs. Diệm had done this from an early age and throughout his adult working life. The original 2019 report recorded this as an important part of the history of his deteriorating condition.

Over the years his right hip deteriorated severely. By the time FoVO first became involved, his right leg had shortened and he needed crutches. X-rays showed that the head of the femur was badly worn and separated from the hip socket.

In 2019, after unsuccessful treatment locally, Diệm travelled to Hanoi for his first hip operation. The cost was met from several sources, including health insurance, the sale of family jewellery and contributions from relatives. FoVO contributed 30 million VND, raised largely through a local men's group in Canberra.

The operation was successful and allowed Diệm to walk again and return to work.

During 2024 – 25 his condition deteriorated again and the pain eventually prevented him from working. The family was by then heavily in debt and could not meet the full cost of further surgery.

Diệm underwent a second operation at Ha Tinh Provincial Hospital. The family received some assistance from relatives and the village and borrowed towards the cost. FoVO contributed 15 million VND (approximately $900) to fill the remaining funding gap, again with substantial support from the same Canberra men's group.

The operation was followed by an infection and an extended stay in hospital, but Diệm recovered and was able to return to work.

Observation

This was not a case in which FoVO paid for someone's medical treatment in full.

Both operations depended on several sources of support: government health insurance, the family's own resources, contributions from relatives and the village, borrowing and FoVO filling part of the remaining gap.

The family had very little financial resilience. A serious medical problem could therefore affect not only Diệm's health but the livelihood and debts of the whole household.

His lack of schooling also left him with few alternatives. He had been fishing since childhood and it was the work he knew. Yet some of the physical demands of that livelihood, particularly repeatedly launching boats from the sand using his legs, had placed enormous strain on his body.

Surgery could restore his mobility, but the purpose of the surgery was ultimately to enable him to return to the same livelihood.

Reflection

A contribution of $900 sounds small beside the total cost of surgery, but in this case the important amount was the funding gap.

FoVO did not need to finance the whole medical system around Diệm. His family, relatives, village and the health system were already contributing. A relatively small outside contribution helped make the treatment possible when those resources were insufficient.

The project also illustrates a limitation of small-scale assistance. Surgery can restore mobility, but it cannot remove the poverty, limited education and physically demanding work underlying a family's circumstances.

Fishing had supported Diệm and his family throughout his working life, but it had also placed enormous demands on his body.

For Diệm, being able to walk meant being able to return to the work he knew.



Diệm on crutches before his first surgery.



Pre-surgery X-ray showing the badly damaged right hip.



Diệm and Shern's fishing crafts: At rear: the sea-going net trawler Centre: circular boat (bamboo frame, bitumen-covered cloth) for access and rowing to shore Front: smaller boat used for river fishing Diệm and Shern's fishing boats — the livelihood to which surgery enabled him to return.

REPORT TO DONORS 2025

In Memory of Thuy (1989 – 2025)



Portrait of Thuy



Thuy with children in an Indigenous village



Thuy's charity work with us in Vong Chep village

IN MEMORY OF THUY 1989 – 2025

Thuy was a friend of FoVO and an energetic charity worker in Vietnam.

She contracted polio as a young child, leaving her with paralysis on her right side. Despite this disability, she completed a pharmacy degree with assistance towards her university fees.

Thuy was a devout Catholic and had hoped to enter religious life, but her health prevented her from being accepted as a novice. Instead, much of her energy went into helping other people.

Using Facebook and her own network of friends and supporters, she raised money and organised small charity projects directly. Her projects included scholarships for disadvantaged students, food for cancer patients, assistance to Indigenous mountain communities and help with building houses.

FoVO sometimes worked alongside Thuy on these projects. She understood the value of local contacts and was generous with her own time and with the volunteers who helped her.

After one of our village projects in Gia Lai Province, Thuy was diagnosed with advanced cervical cancer. She was too frail for chemotherapy and received limited radiotherapy. Her sister returned from overseas and cared for her during the ten months of her illness.

Thuy died on 11 June 2025, aged 36.

Her funeral was attended by hundreds of people. For someone whose own life had been made difficult by disability and illness, she had spent a remarkable amount of it organising help for other people.

We remember her with affection and gratitude.



Thuy sharing a meal with her sister Tuyet Trinh during her illness



Thuy's funeral casket